9 September 2004

Original: English

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2004

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Mu'taz **Hyassat** (Jordan)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with and/or concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 459th meeting, on 8 September 2004, the Committee on Conferences reviewed the statistical data and analyses contained in the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/59/159, paras. 3-14 and annex I) concerning the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2003, compiled in accordance with the methodology adopted by the Committee on Conferences at its 348th meeting, on 18 May 1993. The representative of the Secretariat explained that, under that method, the time utilized for informal meetings or consultations held before the start, after the adjournment or instead of the officially scheduled meetings was not recorded as time lost. The overall utilization factor for 2003 in the four duty stations was 77 per cent, lower than the benchmark of 80 per cent but higher than the utilization rate for the previous two years. In addition, columns had been added showing the number of reassignments of services to related bodies and the utilization factor that would result if reassignments of services unrelated to the cancelling body were not counted. Under that method, the overall utilization factor would drop to 72 per cent. The Committee's opinion was solicited as to the advisability of such an adjustment in the methodology.

04-50309 (E)

2. The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chairman of the Committee on his consultations with bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the previous three sessions. The Chairman noted that utilization had improved somewhat with greater discipline and planning accuracy but, in the case of persistent underutilizers, more radical solutions, such as a revision of the planned number of meetings based on actual past utilization, might be necessary in order to reduce chronic waste. Many bodies had stressed the importance of informal consultations, briefings and regional group meetings to their work, but the calculation of the utilization factor already allowed for such use of scheduled time with due notification to the Secretariat. He emphasized that the intent was more efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources without prejudice to the substantive work of a body, in pursuit of the common goal of achieving fruitful results at the sessions of the organs concerned. The Chairman suggested proposals to improve the utilization of those bodies that failed to reach the benchmark figure, such as consultations on an individual basis between the Department and the substantive and technical secretariats of those bodies that underutilized their conference-servicing resources and information briefings for all underutilizers on best practices and lessons learned.

Discussion

3. The improvement in utilization was welcomed. It was stressed that it was important to inform not only the bureaux but also the membership as a whole of committees so that they would fully understand the importance of efficient utilization. Support was expressed for continuing consultations with underutilizers, with emphasis on the role of the Committee on Conferences and its Chairman and with the proviso that caution should be exercised in pressuring bodies to reduce the number of planned meetings. Further explanations were sought concerning the indicators on related and non-related reassignments, and it was requested that in future reports more detailed information be provided on bodies having related organs. It was suggested that the Secretary-General might be requested to consider alternative methods for calculating the utilization factor.

4. In answer to a question concerning underutilization by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, a representative explained that the Advisory Committee had more than the usual difficulty in predicting the length of its meetings as well as its programme of work, which were driven by other intergovernmental bodies, and that its utilization statistics for 2004 to date did in fact show much improvement.